

OBJECT ART IN NEW MODERN ABSTRACTION A HYPOTHESIS

CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN AAV AND ALAIN VIGUIER

AT
SPEC & ÉDITIONS
Octobre 2005

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1.About form, limits and the return of the Same, and a selection of 37 statements from Art as Art, the selected writings of Ad Reinhardt.

- 1- Work of art, power to remain uniquely itself.
- 2- There is just one painting everytime.
- 3- Perfection of beginnings, eternal return.
- 4- The re-de-mannerization of neo-mannerism.
- 5- Artists come from artists, art forms come from art forms, painting comes from painting.
- 6- The one direction in fine or abstract art today is in the painting of the same one form over and over again.
- 7- Painting as central, frontal, regular, repetitive.
- 8- Brushwork that brushes out the brushwork.
- 9- formless, no top, no bottom, directionless.
- 10- Sign which refuses to signify.
- 11- The re-de-iconologicalization of iconology.
- 12- The re-de-pictographicization of symbol, signal and sign.
- 13- Imageless icons
- 14- There is just one image, one imagelessness, one plane, one depth, one flatness, one color, one colorlessness, one light, one space, one time, one timelessness.
- 15- There is just one art, one artlessness, one painting, one painterliness, one painterliness.
- 16- This painting is my painting if I paint it.
This painting is your painting if you paint it.
This painting is any painter's painting.
This painting is anyone's painting, with few exceptions.
This painting is personal, impersonal, transpersonal.
- 17- The extremely impersonal way for the truly personal.
- 18- The one, eternal, permanent revolution in art is always a negation of the use of art for some purpose other than its own.
- 19- Nothing to take hold of.
- 20- Nothing "usable", "manipulatable", "salable", dealable", "collectible", "graspable".

- 21- One concept escaping concept.
- 22- The first paintings which cannot be misunderstood.
- 23- "Unnamable".
- 24- Beyond "seeing".
- 25- Not "see" it, but "oned" with it
Present to those who can touch, absent only to those who cannot
- 26- Painting that is almost possible, almost does not exist, that is not quite known, not quite seen.
- 27- "What you see is what you see" Being understood
"What you see is not what you don't see" Small mind
- 28- Spectacle of the invisible.
- 29- Up your crass-materialism.
- 30- A clearly defined object, independent and separate from all other objects and circumstances, in which we cannot see whatever we choose or make of it anything we want, whose meaning is not detachable or translatable. A free, unmanipulated and unmanipulatable, useless, unmarketable, irreducible, unphotographable, unreproducible, inexplicable icon.
- 31- Resist at same time as it stays in connection.
- 32- Limits in art are not limits.
No limits in art are limits.
- 33- The more art changes, the more it stays the same.
The more art stays the same, the more it changes.
- 34- The next revolution in art will be the same, old, revolution.
- 35- An avant-garde in art advances art-as-art or it isn't an avant-garde.
- 36- I didn't set up these rules. You can find these all through time. I haven't made one original statement. These have all come from artists who have said something like this as artists.
- 37- All artists-as-artists say the same thing.

Aav : All these statements are my statements. Many other of Ad Reinhardt's statements are also my statements, some are not... Still, I believe my paintings (tableaux) are somehow more like his paintings than his own are. I mean that if my paintings were exactly similar to his in our time, they would be different from what his were in his time. What

was possible to do with a form in his time is no longer possible today, and inversely...

The Same is not the similar or the identical, there is a difference in the repetition, it returns transfigured in a different context.

Viguiier : You mean that what his paintings could do in his time yours can do it in our time!?!...

A : Yes... Like everyone else, Reinhardt had an internalist conception of the artwork. But still, he is the first artist to have drawn the implications of a finished painting... implications which are external, which he explicates and unfolds in different ways outside the painting. In the same way I'm interested in what a painting does rather than in what it is.

"All artists-as-artist say the same thing"... my explications proceed from the same painting... and a painting each time returns for the first time, anew.

"There is just one painting everytime".

V : We know it is the successor who creates the precursor. Reinhardt has today other successors than you. Do you all say the same thing?

A : They don't say that they do... They don't say either that their paintings are the same paintings as Reinhardt's paintings... but it does sometimes happen that we say more or less the same things.

V : Reinhardt is a formalist in the sense that he handles problems of surface, of scale, of de-limitation, etc. in the way these things were coded at the time of Greenberg, even if this was to achieve formlessness... Formlessness in Reinhardt's work follows from a formal device which gives a sort of positive and collective status to the absolute painting... in which even the colour has gone. And his internalist conception of the artwork gives complete priority to contemplation over any interaction and context...

A : Yes, Malevitch's statement, "form doesn't put anything into form", isn't his statement, either is Malevitch's statement about "freed colour"... Nevertheless Reinhardt says about the painting: "Present to those who can touch, absent only to those who cannot". Form doesn't have the final word, and some of the explications of a finished painting's implications proceed through contextual action as in the statements 20 and 29 here, and many others in his writings...

There is a sign and an exteriority to it: Reinhardt is not only concerned by what the painting is but also by what it does, by what it allows one to do or to imagine.

He had already started doing the work I am doing at the Object's outer side... But despite his statement "Limits in art are not limits. No limits in art are limits" his art did remain premised on the theoretical alternative of having limits OR not having limits. In this sense art happens within the limits rather than outside (38). But maybe what he really is saying is what he does not say, what can't be said... but only induced by what is said.

V : Limited, the painting was secured by the form and, moreover, Reinhardt was saying that it was isolated from "life" by the museum. This at a time when limits were being blasted and when the museum had already been turned into a Luna Park... This also limited his acknowledgement of the market and of a more general social context.

A : His conception of the museum context relates directly to his paintings, it corresponds to the logical explications of his painting's implications in the context of art. The museum is defined as an exteriority which is logically adequate to what an absolute painting "is". He pretends to the authority of the theoretician but not really to a theory of the museum.

What is extraordinary in his work is that the art is happening at both sides of that limit which was so important to him, it has that split in the middle of it.

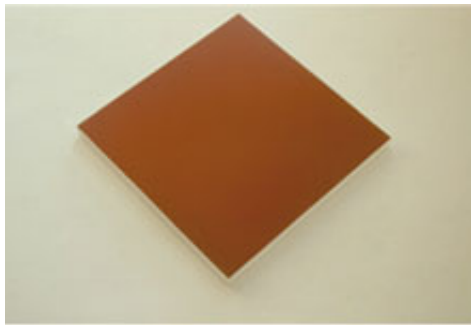
V : You mean that the art is also in treating a thing as the thing it "is"... the way it implies to be treated. But Reinhardt never claimed this contextual and interactive side as part of the artwork!

A : Neither did the early Stella although he had made that shift from painting to sign in an even more radical way... this had led him into a blind alley as it was then said. It was then impossible... but after half a century of conceptual, contextual, postmodernist art we may be in a position to reconsider the problem.

Sources to quotes and note:

- 1- (Art-as-Art) (1966-67), in: Art as Art, the selected writings of Ad Reinhardt. Edited by Barbara Rose. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991 (first published in 1975), p.73
- 2- There Is Just One Painting (1966), p.71
- 3- (Creation as Content), p.193
- 4- 39 Art Planks: Programs for "Program" Painting (1963) n°12, p.69
- 5- Art-as-Art (1962), p.56
- 6- Art-as-Art (1962), p.56
- 7- 25 Lines of Words on Art: Statement (1958), p.52
- 8- 25 Lines of Words on Art: Statement (1958), p.52
- 9- (The Black-Square Paintings) (1963), p.82
- 10- The First Paintings..., p.111
- 11- 39 Art Planks: Programs for "Program" Painting (1963) n°18, p.69
- 12- 39 Art Planks: Programs for "Program" Painting (1963) n°29, p.70
- 13- (Imageless Icons), p.108
- 14- (Art-as-Art) (1966-67), p.71
- 15- (Art-as-Art) (1966-67), p.72
- 16- Abstract Painting, Sixty by Sixty Inches Square, 1960 (1963), p.84
- 17- 25 Lines of Words on Art: Statement (1958), p.52
- 18- The Next Revolution in Art (1964), p.59
- 19- (Oneness), p.106
- 20- Art-as-Art (1962), p.56
- 21- (Art-as-Art) (1966-67), p.78

- 22- The First Paintings..., p.111
- 23- (Oneness), p.107
- 24- (Oneness), p.106
- 25- End, p.113
- 26- (Imageless Icons), p.108
- 27- (Art in the World), p.133
- 28- Twelve rules for an academy, p.203
- 29- (Government and the Arts), p.181
- 30- The Black-Square Painting Shows, 1963,1964,1965 (1966), p.83
- 31- (Oneness), p.107
- 32- Art in Art is Art-as-Art (1966), p.65
- 33- 44 Titles for Articles for Artists under 45 (1958), p.149
- 34- The Next Revolution in Art (1964), p.59
- 35- The Next Revolution in Art (1964), p.59
- 36- Bruce Glaser. An Interview with Ad Reinhardt (1966-1967), p.19
- 37- An Artist, a Fine-Artist or Free-Artist, p.142
- 38- For a more extensive study of Reinhardt's formalism see: Aav. Et puis quoi alors. Ukio, automne 1994



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2.About the atomic object and the reversibility of its Being into the exteriority of its Event.

Aav : A Painting (Tableau) is there, at first sight, it is absolute (unrelational), atomic, one - it breaks down to no other part than itself -, imageless, radical, solipsist (self-referential), silent... it is an abstract painting, a pure negative, an Object.

O Object, presence and grace!

Viguiier : You must have people asking you if this is a return to an essentialist or substantialist ontology. I must admit, one could see here a naive realism or naturalism and as a result an Idol.

A : An Idol, a despotic signifier, is in principle supposed to be collective. An Object can only exist for each person, it has no objective or intersubjective foundation. You are alone... It is a possibility as a percept and as a concept - obvious, *prima facie* -, but it is not a possibility in theoretical reason, it has no legitimate grounds to stand on as a collective being... Theoreticians are right to say that such an object is impossible. But it is precisely on the grounds of this impossibility that it becomes a possibility in art!...

You believe in what you see, but what you see is "beyond belief", one could say that it is the less well shared commonplace in the world.

V : So there is no repeated thing which can be isolated or abstracted from the repetition itself?

A : The word abstraction has the advantage of referring to an abstracted object as well as to the act of abstracting this object. A non-objective, absolute painting is never already painted into a Painting, it can't occur independently from an act of personal consideration... it is the viewer who is a "painter"... and a painting each time appears for the first time anew.

Its timelessness is always in real time.

There is just one timeless painting, everytime.

V : A pure negative... something which can only be defined by saying what it is not, as Reinhardt did?

A : Yes, when you define it as a substantive rather than as a verb. In its timeless and fixed appearance, it is purely affirmative, verbal and dynamic. Object is the name of what has no double, of what has no name.

V : "Unnamable", "One concept escaping concept", but still we are using here a concept!

A : An infinitive rather than a noun... But it is in the nature of a painting to be shown, and there is no ostentation without a degree of substantiation, of generality. Still, it is an infinitive rather than it is a noun.

But if we look at things from the point of view of an Object's Event rather than from the point of view of its Being, from the point of view of the effects rather than of the cause, it is then clear that there is a shift in levels between the concept of an Object and the concept of a realist object-for-everybody - or an Idol, as you said -, a shift in the idea. Both these objects have very different implications and do not work at all in the same way... they clearly don't do the same things. An Object can't be shared at a primary level without becoming something else than an Object. Both possibilities correspond to clearly different Events.

V : There is the possibility of an Object as directly accessible as percept and as concept... the possibility of a "presence" which has been a sort of sea-snake in modern abstraction. For Reinhardt this presence is contemplative, but you are a pragmatist... I mean that a conception is to

be tested by the practical effects it has in a context... by what it does rather than by what it is. Meaning is not prior to action and to the world.

A : The term pragmatism belongs to philosophy, used in art it can be no more than just a way of speaking... There is an attention for the exteriority of the sign... An Object has no relations but, as such, it has implications.

The work is propositional and logical, it proceeds from IF to THEN; from an Object's logical implications in the context of art to their explications, and back again. Given an Object, you can then somehow "turn around" it by unfolding its Event. This is an active and contextual process, but on the other hand the contemplative and ostentatious "presence" remains central to art.

V : By unfolding an absolute painting's implications, its implied effects, you take it into the dimension of its spectacle and of its Event. Any sign can be considered from the point of view of its Event, through the practical effects it has in interacting with the world. Artworks interact with the context in which they are actualised and maintained as artworks...

A : You can also find that they interact with things far beyond the close art context, or that they have a potential to do this...Of course the interactions of a new or different sign are generally more perceptible than those of a sign we are used to.

V : An Event may be actualised, but its existence is always also virtual. Imagined or acted out, potential or actualised, explications are unfolded in chronological time. But the whole Event is instantaneously anticipated and intuited through the fulguration of a multiplicity of possible effects. The Event is the unconscious of a being's "presence".

A : Intelligence is the mind's ability to anticipate... to evaluate the forces at play. Yes, an Event "exists" as much in its potential effects - in potentia, in potency - than in their actualisations - in actu -, intensively as well as extensively. Its instantaneousness can make you say that it is both what is to come and what has already happened. There is no primacy of a Being over an Event - of a cause over an effect, of a precedent over a consequent -, they are both initial and synchronic to each other and perfectly reversible. The Event and the context it occurs in are no less originary than the being... Our idea of an object is the idea of its Event, its reality is always in part virtual. The possibility of a being or a sign only corresponds to the possibility it's Event has in being actualised in the world. Any potential has already its origin in the milieu in which it is likely to be actualised, its existence as its truth do not precede the world. We could talk about the onto-logical reality of an Object...

V : The routes of being... In Object art, the problematic is deliberately blocked in depth in order for meaning to be displaced into a field of exteriority - on the other side of the limit. An Object is less what you

end up with than a point of departure.

A : A sign is a force... Art is a laboratory for the sign!

V : Robert Smithson said that an artwork was both a thing and a way of seeing that thing. There is no work which exists without being sustained by a point of view and by process.

A : All works need to be implemented (to use Nelson Goodman's word) by a some one in order to work. A work needs not only to be seen but also needs to be considered according to the perspective from which it was made... which is built into it.

A percept is not a simple perception.

V : An Object is as it works...

A : And as what it does or allows to do... It opens a field of exteriority which is both contextual and processual, but which is clearly distinct from the notions of context and of interactivity as they have been established in postmodernist theory since they do not proceed in a continuity to flux and context but from a limit, a split...



[TOP](#)

3.About the alternative between having or not having limits as equally obstructive to the idea of the Event.

Viguiet : Ideas of fullness and self-presence, and of silence and unrepresentability have been promoted by Romanticism, Symbolism and by a strong current of abstract art up to the early minimalist art-as-object tautologies, and since then in a more underground way.

Postmodernism has been a strong refutation of this thesis.

Aav : A salutary refutation which has exercised a real critical activity and has finished undermining a naive realism... I'm not interested in refuting that refutation even though I keep the art-as-object proposition. The problem about that refutation is that it remains premised on what it refutes... on its inverted image, somehow affirmed in order to be negated. There is an irony about this refutation which has somehow kept the art-as-object still alive under the ashes...

V : Still, art is not based on the denial of of what it is not, but on the affirmation of what it is... to quote Deleuze: to affirm a difference is not necessarily a negation of what the affirmation differs from.

A : Yes, what is important are the works themselves. Nevertheless, the neo avant-garde project which was pursued through postmodernism was to dissolve the work's unity, to place it in the contingencies of actual context, to break its limits in space and time, etc., etc. Peter Bürger has pointed this out quite some time ago. Then it was as a "failure" that people came in the end to accept the idea that even non-object art was limited, that even these works were necessarily abstractions and were transferable. This has given way to a certain cynicism.

V : Smithson was already saying "if it is art, it must have limits"... This was seen as a failure to establish the primacy of the particular over the general, of the transient over the permanent, of use value over exchange value, a failure to oppose a deep resistance to the art institution, to the museum as a "place of confinement". Postmodernist theory never seems to be able to account for these limits other than by default - still sort of whispering that if these limits had been broken it wouldn't have been a "failure". This is where we have been at for now almost thirty years... We both found the postmodernist approach of little help in reconsidering the problem of limits.

A : Nevertheless, we must not forget that the modernist thesis was premised on an internalist conception of the artwork corresponding to a denial of the context. Daniel Buren summarised this in the late sixties by saying : "When the artwork appears, the museum disappears." Non-object's critical activity has been salutary.

V : The refutation of limits was also a criticism of the Euclidian conception of space... you know, the good old fence around the garden... but in the meantime a new concept of unity and limitation was being formed through this critical activity. Unity is no longer conceived as a whole made of parts which are circumscribed as space or time, but as a plane of consistency which combines multiple and heterogeneous elements in space and time and which makes them hold together independently from any spatial contiguity or any topographical boundary. Smithson himself had already gone that way at the time he he referred to the work's unescapable unity.

For a long time we liked thinking the work had expanded beyond the field of vision, we now realise it is the field of vision itself which has

expanded.

A : Despite the tremendous work postmodernism has done in opening the work to the context in which it appears, it somehow hasn't escaped an internalist definition because, as we just said, all these works show to be limited and transferable.

V : You mean that theories which refute the modernist closure are all historically premised on the alternative between works which have OR do not have limits. Postmodernism shares this with modernism!?

A- Exactly, art shifts from a topographical conception of limitation to a topological one, while keeping the terms of the alternative still exclusive of each other through promoting non limitation, while keeping the alternative as a premise and defining the limit's existence by default.

V : ... In theory, not always in art... I know many works which seem not to care less about the alternative!

A : Surely, but I'm trying to illustrate my point... I mean that if limits are unescapable, one might as well tighten them up and try to skip over to the other side.

V : It's true that even works which don't care less about being or not being limited still have an exteriority to their limits... an "other side".

A : As you say, work and "Frame" both work together...

V : Is it because of these reasons which are in built into postmodernist theory that works and their institutional framework have not seriously been correlated as partaking of a same history?... There are correlations between the works we are talking about and the institutional context in which they exist that seems to me quite unaccounted for in art history. What is also interesting is that these correlations don't only concern the past, but are reactivated each time a work is exhibited.

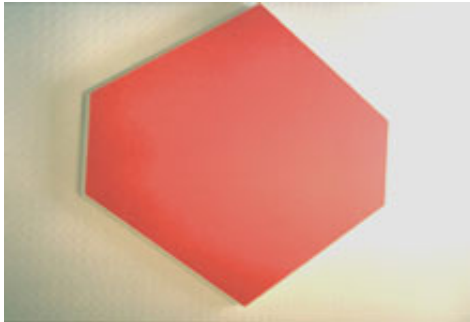
A : You're the historian...

V : ... Well, here's a historian's question: art-as-object, its timelessness, has been qualified as non-historical. How do you see it as proceeding from a particular moment in time?

A- ... We can say it has a certain timeless structure... I mean the capacity the mind has to abstract a thing and to contemplate its eternal being; the subject-object structure... Its a problem which is at the beginning of philosophy. But Object art is historic in a double sense; historic because it taps onto the forces of the abstract tradition, and historic because its possibility as art must proceed from a state of language or of the world at a certain moment in time.

V : What about the accusation that "self-presence" blocks memory.

A : The Return of a Same painting is not about remembering although it can surely make an historian remember all sorts of things... I think one is only able to remember the past as one is able to imagine the present... The mind remembers just as it anticipates. It's as much a question of geography than of history...



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4.About the distinction between a panel and an Object as both distinct from the artwork.

Viguiier : You say that an absolute painting is never already painted into an Object, that it cannot even be given a positive status as art. What status has it exactly?

Aav : I make panels not Objects, it is up to each person to consider, or "paint", a panel into an Object. As I have said, it's an act of personal consideration.

IF it is an Object, THEN... or; if it is art, then..., if it is an ironing board, then... if it is a company logo, then... if it is an Idol, then... in each of these cases you have a different thing within an identical form and each of these things implies different effects. As signs, they don't work the same way, they don't do the same things. In each case is intuited, imagined and acted out a different Event.

There is no inherence of an Object to a form, an Object cannot be secured within a form; a form can only be more or less adequate to be considered as an Object.

A panel is craft, not art... and anybody can make one. I have made these statements again and again in texts and in manifests.

V : If neither a panel nor an Object are art where is the art?

A : In the case of an Object, the limit is not what borders the work, but

what crosses through the middle of it. The art starts when an Object is finished. There is an Object, a subject and a context, the art is in between all three. An Object is only one element in the work of Object art.

That's why you will never find a signature attached to a panel. What is signed is a combination, a circuiting. ... And in a way, the combination is the signature itself.

V : Robert Morris said about the same things you are, while referring to his box-like shapes around the mid-sixties. The object is only one of the terms, the two other were the spectator and the site. Are these works part of your referential tool-box?

A : Yes, I probably wouldn't have thought those sort of things were possible if other artists hadn't done them before me.

But with Morris there is a contradiction between an autonomous object and a work in which the object is only one of the terms, not a split.

Moreover, since Site Specificity we have learned that a site has so many different ways of being specific...

V : His strategy didn't prevent these objects from being reified as art...

A : I don't know, ... I think the concept and the certificate have already become more important than the objects. The real question is: do they still work as art or do they become something else when reified? Works don't sustain their identities on a purely visual or formal, physical level... they also have their own rules!

However, my approach is quite different to Morris' and I do not at all conceive art's resistance to market value the way he did... neither in the way non-object art in general did.

V : We'll return later to that problem... So, the art is neither in a panel nor in an Object, it is in the actualisation of an Object in the context of art. ... But to show a panel doesn't necessarily make it into an Object... isn't it so.

A : Yes, that's how an Object works... a panel is just a panel... a panel is an Object for whom it is an Object... you know this for yourself but you can't know it for others...

V : I remember Domino's exhibition. As a guest curator to the Atelier Mémoire he had invited you to exhibit there. You returned the invitation, offering him to show panels under his own name... and he accepted.

A : Yes, that was in 1996. it was his own show. My name only appeared on a label in a corner of the gallery as the panel-maker. There were many people at the opening. Nothing could be taken for granted in this exhibition... We played the game all the way and it was good fun.

V : One could also wonder if it was art. By standing on the edge he was addressing this question.



Panels exhibited by Domino at Atelier Mémoire, 1996.

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5.About the implementation and the maintenance of artworks, and about divergent notions of interactivity and context, and back to Object art.

Viguiier : A work needs to be implemented in order to work. It is both a thing and a way of seeing that thing, ... the aesthetic relation, spectatorship, is necessarily dynamic.

To the idea of "implementation" Goodman grafts the notion of "maintenance". ... If an artwork needs to be implemented in order to work, it also needs to be maintained, treated, administrated, in an adequate way in order to work.

Not only this, many contemporary works need to be partially or completely reconstructed at each exhibition; if the artist is absent, this is done by the curator or the registrar. Display, lighting, restoration, conservation, reproduction, documentation, author's rights, and several other sections, all partake of a context of maintenance. The way you treat something, the way you show it, needs to be coherent with what this thing "is". Each work - its particular way of existing - implies a particular adjustment of its context of maintenance into what I have called its "Frame". What has become apparent since the time of the neo avant-garde is the inseparability between the work and its maintenance. I have been working for some time on these problems; with you in *Logique du Cadre* (1), with Ivan Clouteau in a more practical and pluridisciplinary way (2), and in teaching.

Aav : Because maintenance is sustained through implementation one can say that the maintenance is partaking of the aesthetic relation itself... the actor in the maintenance is always first a spectator... The maintenance partakes of the aesthetic as well as of the artistic, of the reception as well as of the production while blurring the border between both. Alongside this idea we did need to clarify different notions of interactivity...

V : Yes, in correlation with the idea of limits in postmodernism, the notion of interactivity is understood as the spectator's input into an

always unfinished work, ... in the process of being produced... On the other hand, the maintenance, which is also a form of interactivity, is applied in relation to a "finished" work, it is exerted from the other side of the limit, from the outer side... Both approaches are discontinuous with each other... in theory.

A : Ah! Reinhardt, in a discussion with his fellows of the New York School in 1950 - a discussion about when a work is finished, or couldn't be finished -, he says : "problems start when you're handling a painting as a finished object." And he adds further : "I want to know the painting's exterior truth, the interior one I think I know it." ... I find this almost prophetic, and very humorous in the context of the New York School!

Sorry, keep going...

V : ... Jointly to the understanding of interaction as an inside process to the work, the context is conceived in a continuity with the work. Whether it be in time or in space, the limits expand while works become immersive or decorative. I mean; what happens on the other side of the limit is not accounted for for reasons which are somehow in built into the theory as we were saying the other day.

A : It can't account for the Frame as partaking of the material field of the work itself...

V : Beside this, artists have always been collaborating, sometimes even intimately, with institutions, with curators, with collectors, etc. at the level of the exhibition, of the maintenance of their works... which is so often most problematic. There are intimate correlations between changes in art since the mid XXth century and the changes in curatorial practices, in museum architecture and in everything else which operated the integration of works. This dimension of interactivity exists in practice rather than in art theory. Those who have been interested in it - as people of the ISP (Independent Study Program) at the Whitney Museum or Jean-Marc Poinot at the university Rennes 2 - have been labelled under "institutional theory".

Since the history of art is the history of the avant-garde, I think art history and art mediation would gain by opening up more to that side of things.

A : If it is true that the modernist closure did block the conscience of the work's contextual conditions at the time postmodernism started its critique, I think that today it is the art criticising limits which, paradoxically, is blocking the conscience of these same conditions. ... We're back to square one: When the work appears, the museum disappears!...

V : I remember Buren stating in 1998 his opposition to the "autonomous work" and assimilating it to the "commodity" and to "capitalism". I felt that what was said in 1998 was different from what was said in 1968 although the words could have been perfectly identical... it just didn't have the same meaning!

A : Some museums have become more avant-garde than the artists themselves! Art-as-life has been doing very well in institutional politics. The transitory, the immersive, the ephemeral have now the character of the unchangeable. The more art changes, the more it stays the same. Even some of the most extreme works end up as a sort of new "formalism" in which, within a certain set of rules, "anything goes"... (With certain exceptions).

V : Anyway, if we account for the limits of these works, whatever these works are, we can expand our ideas of interactivity and of context by considering them from the point of view of their Events. A work's Frame (an adequate context of maintenance) is part of a work's implications and in this sense it partakes of its Event.

An Event is always more or less consciously perceived, but it somehow "exists"... its effects can be acted out or remain virtual or latent. I believe the spectator has a lot to learn from understanding a work's Frame. I mean that if the actor is always first a spectator I think the spectator is also a potential actor. The idea of a spect-actor has been at work right from the beginning in what we each have been doing.

A : Yes, my work is in between an Object, a spect-actor and and a sort of more or less conscious topology or "site" spread out with the Event. But I don't think that what you call the "Frame" of maintenance is so easily continuous with an "absolute object". Your Frame will never be quite right...

V : Maybe, but you couldn't imagine an Object, or any thing in art, without the Frame in which it is actualised, shown.

A : No, of course... an Object doesn't exist independently from its maintenance and from its spectacle in the context of art. Nevertheless a Frame can only be more or less adequate in helping someone consider a panel as an Object... there either there is no Frame which would make a panel into an Object. An Object is precisely what allows us to imagine that there is a play, to experience a disjointure between both...

The correct way of showing an Object would be on a white wall with a diffuse and neutral lighting so that they are erased and transparent. But, it would make no difference for a non-relational object to be shown on a green wall with a red lighting ... it would still be the Same Object. Nevertheless, wall and lighting go from erasure, in one case, to interaction and reflexivity, in the other. An erased and continuous element can overturn into a discontinuous and reflexive one... and the other way round.

V : Nevertheless, there has to be an adherence... there can be no complete split between what a thing "is" and the way it is shown or maintained...

A : Yes... the way it is related to as being what it "is". I believe that this disjointure reveals the Frame rather than it denies it.

The Event is not less "originary" than the being, there is a

synchronicity between cause and effect... we spoke of that a few days ago... The "Frame" expands well beyond the close technical context you are talking about.

V : You mean a Frame which is much less easy to get hold of...

A : The important thing is that an Object switches you onto the plane of its Event, turns you into a spect-actor, even though an Event can never itself be represented as a whole, or even represented at all, because you are always too much part of it... it is too contingent, too oceanic for that. ... its virtuality is always too unconscious. You may intuitively anticipate at once an Event, but it is only successively that you can unfold in it a thousand planes...

What is important is that you perceive the field of the Event as the site of an exhibited Object, the invisible part of the spectacle.

V : All this could lead us to talking about the conventional ways of exhibiting art from non Western cultural minorities as a negation of the way we have defined art.

A : Yes, the work minus its Event, when we have defined the Event as both the origin and the end of the work.

Notes:

1- Aav et Alain Viguier. Logique du Cadre. Précédents et conséquences de la neo avant-garde. Hôtel des Bains Edition, 2005.

2- See the internet site managed by Ivan Clouteau :

<http://www.parallaxe.net>



[TOP](#)

6.About the author, the signature, the sponsor and the spect-actor.

Aav : The first panel/Object I exhibited was at Le Salon des Anonymes at Nikki Diana Marquardt gallery in Paris in March 1989. I had until then been painting and exhibiting semio-contextualist works and monochrome paintings in France and in Australia for about ten years... I had the feeling I had reached the end of something... over the last years the work had been narrowing down to tautological pieces and installations. But what I was showing in this exhibition had in one go jumped onto another plane... the former work had in one go turned up-side-down... It was "the same old revolution" Reinhardt had talked about!...

In the exhibition there were no names alongside the works but everybody could recognise Koons, Beuys or Duchamp. That's when I also dropped the title off.

From then, under the same author's name the work came with a new signature... or was itself a new signature... considering it is the signature that makes the author rather than the other way round.

Viguiier : You mean that it is the art which makes the author rather than the author who makes the art... It is true that there is no author prior to a work...

A : An artist's signature has two sides to it; on one side a proper name attached to a person, on the other a way of seeing and of making... I mean a signature is not what comes on top of a work, it is the work itself... the vector which makes heterogeneous elements work together... the rule or the cipher which enables us to see what is shown.

V : A combination... Yes, I think it's the case for all authors...

A signature has a certain autonomy and ideas have a life of their own, that's why you don't need to push them all the time... This leaves you time for ideas which are not your own. Recently I have written an extensive text on the art of Peter Hutchinson and I have been working on space and landscape in central Australia, and doing other things...

A : Oh, have you!...

V : I am your principal collaborator and sponsor. I make a living by teaching in contemporary history and theory and I try to work within the rules of academic orthodoxy.

A : Yes, I know, that's why you never mention my work in your talks... but I'm not complaining... because we are having a good time together. Whom would I be having this sort of conversation with...

V : Now that we have talked about ourselves, the first producers... What about the spect-actor?

A : An absolute painting alienates the subject by being separate. But as some abstract painters have been saying it until this day: the subject is present to oneself as the painting is to itself... The feeling of one's own presence to the world... as a preliminary to a dissolved self. But as we said earlier, the subject of an Object is also the subject of an Event. The contemplative and transcendent "presence" is at another level

the immanent "presence" of a contingent exteriority. At the level of an Object the subject is self-centered, "present to oneself", at the level of the Event the subject is completely ex-centered and scattered.

V : An Event is collective, it belongs to a transpersonnal exteriority of signs... there is no autonomous subject which would be placed above signs... Just as the author is, the spect-actor is the mime or the automaton of the logical unfoldings of a sign's Event.

A : I like Peirce's idea that the logical form is already achieved in the sign itself before being achieved in the mind... The routes of the Event are the routes of the mind... one's mind is no less in signs out there than in one's brain.

V : Some people are going to say that there is not much room here for an individual subject ... a person.

A : Probably. But, on the other hand, how could not each of us be a different person... the expression of a possible world. The way one territorialises signs, the way one makes them work together, is generally the affair of a fairly personal combination. Even Bouvard and Pécuchet don't repeat exactly the same things.



Tableaux, Galerie Nikki Diana Marquardt, Paris, 1992



Tableaux, Galerie Nikki Diana Marquardt, Paris, 1992



With works by Flavin and Divola, Galerie Nikki Diana Marquardt, 1992



[TOP](#)

7.About exclusivity and pluralism in the field of art, and about

truth, communication and the future of the avant-garde.

Viguier : Some people probably ask you why some of your texts which claim an abstract art recall the somehow outmoded form of the art manifesto...

Aav : The manifest corresponds to the fundamentally affirmative and exclusive - agonistic - nature of the work of modern or avant-garde art. ... Pluralism is not about works which are themselves and everything else at the same time.

V : Are you understating that the Return of a modern painting can only come After postmodernism?

A : The way this word is used is never quite clear. It isn't necessarily contradictory to the modern. My only concern is to disentangle a particular blocking in postmodernist theory. ... What's the matter with people wanting to send you straight back to a Before as soon as you start talking of an Absolute painting!

Object art is propositional not ideological, it is local not total, it is a "language game", as Wittgenstein would say, or a "system of limited generality", as you sometimes say. "Abstract Art" can no longer come under a unified concept; postmodernism has defined it as a field: a variety of sometimes incompatible orientations in which there is no centre.

The affirmation of Object art is not the negation of non-object or postmodernist art within a pluralistic field. A logical context and a closed object do not exclude a syntactic context and an open object, they just work at two different (and locally exclusive) levels.

V : Yes, one can no longer evaluate a work on the basis that it belongs to such or such school. Works today combine so many different currents and operate on so many different levels. You have to depart from the work itself, not from criteria which would levitate above it. If some currents are alive, schools have had it!

A : Group exhibitions in the sixties and seventies started inaugurating the coexistence of different systems...

V : Just like the art you and I like, our friends also come from all walks of life. Remember Ukio, the little magazine we used to publish with Bader, Creuvier, Domino and Hubert-Rodier between 1993 and 2000. At each editorial meeting there were a lot of people and none of them knew it was a meeting. The parties were good fun... we only found out what was in the magazine once it was being put together... We flew over the 1996 market crisis with panache.

A : Christian Hubert-Rodier is part of a generation of radical abstract artists which started working in the early eighties. Since that time his work has been steady in form and direction... He has been painting abstract paintings over and over again... without ever conceding to the disembodiment of images. Still, it would be a joke if we said to each

other that we should initiate a school.

V : Schools, movements, are always like schools of cats and dogs, but from the outside they look like families or like battalions where everyone seems to stick together. But really the artist is left alone to affirm a difference despite everything else.

A : The avant-garde, the new, which itself is a sort of negative, gets also constantly confused with negativity. That a work excludes from its combination what it is not does not mean that it negates what it is not... As we already said, art is For what it is and not Against what it is not... The agonistic nature of modern art is not necessarily an antagonism...

V : As we also said, we can see that despite the apparent antagonism between the institution and the avant-garde, both have been synchronic in their changes. We said that an Event only really exists through the possibility it has of being actualised in a context... Yes, artists and institutions have been collaborating all the way! The permanent ex-centering of centrality necessarily entails some flexibility within the isomorphism of something which wants to conserve itself by repeating itself in an always identical way.

A : What I wanted to say was that the new and negativity are two separate things. If they are still confused under the current notion of the avant-garde they need to be analysed separately... Once you have done that, then you can start asking why they get confused...

V : This confusion which masks the synchronicities between art and context has not been very helpful in accounting for the history of the context of maintenance as relevant to art history.

A : ...

V : The emphatic tone of the manifesto aims at convincing, but then you seem to be speaking to somebody who would be out of reach or missing in the audience.

A : The emphasis... the loud-speaker... Yes, I sometimes do get carried away.

But then, who exactly are you speaking to? On one side a proposition needs to be affirmative and concise, but then who could it possibly convince? How does a proposition become "true"? A truth which is patent to the author can seem deplorably personal to a listener...

Obviously, even the "decision makers" in the art institution are not in a position to decide alone whether a proposition is true or false. Nobody can measure alone the extent of an Event... A new sign has to be compatible with a multiplicity of other signs, with series of signs and of Events... Decisions proceed from a play of forces in a complex field in which artists are at least as important as decision-makers (art comes from art). This of course is also true for all areas of research, not just for art.

Modern institutions are in a permanent readjustment to the world, to its changes and mutations...The power is always already moving somewhere else without knowing exactly where. The Forecast of a force is always a political affair but there is no meta-control...

V : Aren't people themselves receptive to change?

A : Of course, individuals are somehow mobile. But sometimes new ideas make them feel like they are lying... because they are always saying they want things to change... sometimes even claiming it on high horses.

V : William James wrote that truth is what happens to a proposition... a proposition becomes true, it is made true as it is actualised in the social field.

A : Yes... There is nobody to convince... the force of a proposition has nothing to do with the force it is said with. What I want has no incidence on what the world wants or on what a sign can do. It's when a proposition has been established as true and that it voiced with a loud-speaker... that's when you have to move off!...

V : The loud-speaker, that excess... is often associated to the persona of the artist.

A : You hope one would be only left with the excessive and anonymous nature of difference itself, the loud-speaker would then be doing a good job.

V : Although you position your work as a difference, there is no fundamental fracture between your studio and the museum-gallery... That's a remark Mel Ramsden made, referring to the "manifesto" New Art Has a Future published by Spec&Editions (1). He said that this merging of the place of production into the place of diffusion was a passive approach to the museum enterprise.

A : Since long ago Artists have vacated the studio as a place which would be meaningful in itself.

What is interesting about Art & Language is the way the studio was reinvested as a historical genre in the late seventies and early eighties with a reference to the Index they had made earlier in the seventies... The index presents you with a scatter of references which are prior to any finished product... The work in the museum takes you back to the studio as a place of working and producing meaning... you are taken into the process.

What I'm doing of course partakes of a very different process, it is inseparable from a context of actualisation. I don't think the separation of the two places Ramsden talks about is a necessary condition to "the autonomy of art".

V : There is also this idea that if the studio is absorbed by the museum - rather than the museum being absorbed by the studio - the practice of art could be cast into the museum's artistic ideology... there would have

to be some distance between the studio and the museum.

A : I don't think you can state so clearly an inside and an outside to the museum... As we said earlier, the split is a possibility of the institution itself rather than a split between an inside and an outside... On the basis of such a division, nobody escapes being a "double agent".

V : Still, isn't that giving a lot of credit to the museum enterprise which has its shortcomings...

A : I make no difference between a potential and an actual museum-gallery... the problem of their separation is secondary in my practice... one can't be on every front-line...

V : ... Well I think some institutional shortcomings need to be criticised and acted upon. How would things ever change?...

A : ...

V : ...

A : The studio is the first place in which a work's implications are actualised. I don't see it as fundamentally different to the museum-gallery (or even to the book-catalogue) as a place of diffusion which only proceeds in pursuing the same logic... it's only a matter of degrees in a work's public becoming.

But what is a "place"? Cezanne said he was doing an art for the museum... the museum he was painting for and the museum he did not fit in couldn't be called the same "place". Again, the museum has no priority over the work as the cause has no priority over the possibility of a field in which its effects can be actualised.

V : The New has no Forecast (Avenir) (2), it only has a Future... the incalculable.

Truth is something that happens, or does not happen to a proposition. But a proposition can be sustained with independence from being true or false. As Peirce said, it can be contemplated as a sign susceptible to be asserted or negated... it keeps its full meaning whether it is asserted or negated.

A : The proposition is purely affirmative, assertive, from the point of view of the Future, hypothetical from the point of view of the Forecast... considering that Forecast always implies a resolution in truth of falsity. But a proposition is worth more by the problem underlying it than by any resolution... "truth" is worth for the embarrassment it gets the mind in... The "truth in painting" is an attack within the fortress of received ideas.

V : The Forecast happens when tomorrow is split-off from now and is exerting coercive forces upon it. As Bourdieu said, investment must make a short or a long term return... its always a time in respite... The

Future makes no split between the time of investment and the time of return... it is absolutely modern !

A : An artist should never exchange a Future with no Forecast against a Forecast with no Future... The Future keeps you in touch with the dramatic reality of history...

But how do you address such a proposition?!... What is apparently addressed to understanding through communication and calls for the listeners ascent (even if improbable) seems to operate, to "communicate", in a less conscious, less verbal order of facts.

V : But what we are doing just now is to communicate...

A : Yes it's part of it... but communication is also something which will never happen and something which has always already happened... it has happened in the fact that an idea is always already in the company of a lot of other people's ideas. And when you find a new potential to a sign, when you combine a new concept or make an old idea into a new one, this immediately becomes potentially communicable within a quasi-universal space... even before any communication has been made of it!

Where does "communication" happen exactly?

Beside, an idea has a life of its own, and a natural life span. Freed from ideological casing it is only left with its viral reality; the ability the meme has to duplicate itself without any friction or limits... (3)

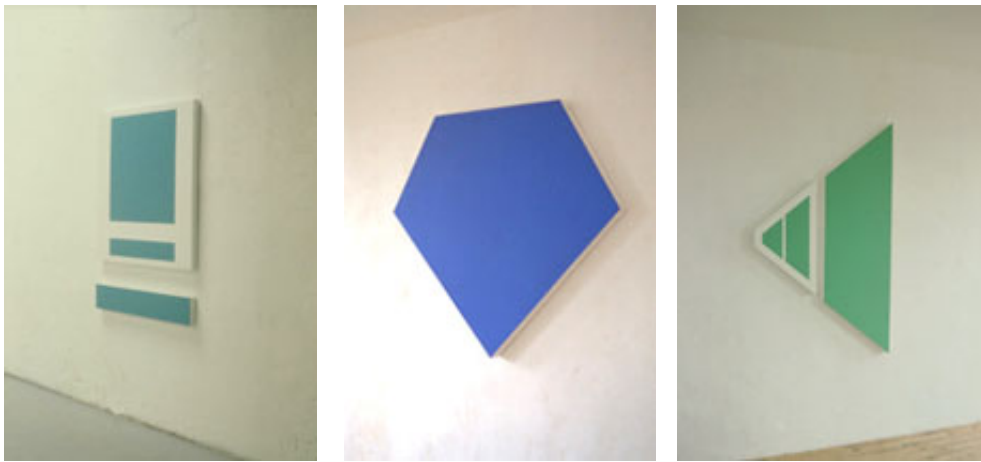
Small enterprises don't have the means of distribution, so they have to rely on propagation... at least they have the advantage over big enterprises in being able to check that sometimes these ideas do move by their own...

V : The new, the modern, subsists with a potential and a virtual "existence"... but when it has reached the public, when it has been acted out, it is that it has already become true or that it is in the process of becoming true... it's already too late. As Jean-François Lyotard put it, when the modern is publicly actualised it is already post-modern...

A : ... and it is only once post-modern that, retrospectively, one can see it as having, once, been modern. Time is out of joint... and you wonder where communication would have ever happened...

Notes:

- 1- Published unsigned as a centrefold to Spec&Editions' 2001 bulletin.
- 2- Le futur and l'avenir are often used as synonymous words in French but they also have been separated by Jean-François Lyotard into the meanings they are given here. L'avenir is a sort of future-anterior or forecast.
- 3- The concept of the "meme" is from Richard Dawkins.



[TOP](#)

8.About form and implications.

Viguier : Despite the status the panel has it can't be confused with the readymade. A panel is somehow also made, and not only shown or maintained, into what it "is".

Aav : A form can be more or less adequate to be considered as an Object, you will never make an Object. It's not a question of being the author or not... As an author, I don't sign either an Object or a panel. ... You can make a panel out of almost any shape and colour, there are no worries.

V : The brushwork has disappeared into an even surface which often has not quite sunk the weave of the canvas. You use all sorts of colours... acrylic paint with its flat and banal quality. A panel is both a surface and a volume. The width of the stretcher makes the painting stand as an object on the wall, the sides are primed but not painted and they somehow work as a ground to the surface figure ... or are themselves the figure? A plane-volume (un plan-volume) you once called it. This somehow keeps the panel separate from the wall. Symmetry also, by preventing the panel from floating around on the wall, contributes to its separateness. When a panel has more than six or seven sides, it starts to remind of all sorts of other things, so shapes are kept quite simple although open to multiple variations...

Panels have no titles or numbers and no dating. You make them in a haphazard and unrelated way, sometimes you have them made by other

people... and sometimes leave them behind after shows.

A : Yes, it's just a panel... What you see is what you see!...

V : But things don't just fall out of the sky. There must be some method and a certain sympathy in making them...

A : Sure, there is always a method even though it can change from one time to another... and its logical unfolding is always sympathetic. But you go blindly! Because it is only once it is finished that you can see how a panel looks. I like some more than others but then I never remember by which particular method it was made, or sometimes even if it was made by me. You'll probably end up with a more adequate panel when it is made with method and sympathy but nothing has proven me this to be really true.

V : I can hear some people saying that you can't suppress the fold between figuration and non-iconic abstraction. The index has unlocked modernist abstraction from its supposed closure.

A : As talkativeness has undermined its silence, as proliferation has broken its simplicity... The Neo Geo artists, the Appropriationists and many other artists have been handling such problems... We end up with a much more conceptual notion of plasticity itself.

It is sure that a return to the non-iconic can no longer be premised on the negation of this plasticity. That would be the end of art... since most of the exciting work done today develops semiotic or syntactic propositions. As I said before, both systems operate on different levels...

Many of the artists from the movements I just mentioned had gone beyond any opposition between the iconic and the non-iconic with the simulacra. The non-iconic icon is no less iconic than the iconic icon, it is "the image of imagelessness" as Reinhardt put it.

This is why I call myself an abstract "painter"!

V : You have started by making self-referential, more formal panels in two or several parts.

A : I occasionally still do... But form risks inducing that a panel would be already painted into an Object. The only advantage of form is to show what a panel can look like when treated pictorially.

V : You insist on the fact that the paintings you paint always the Same, single, ultimate painting?

A : Yes, always the Same one... I'm serious. Let me explain. The panels all look different, but their differences are unimportant - they are ornamental in a sense. What is important is not that they are all the Same, but that they all work the same way when considered as an Object. A thing owes its objectivity to the "existence" (actual or virtual) of its Event. This is why it is not a problem if you are colour blind or even blind...

V : Radical abstraction has often been a turning point between the end of something and the beginning of something else. It is at the beginning of all sorts of things which diverge in all sorts of directions. This happened in the historical avant-garde with Rodtchenko or Lissitzky for example. it happened with object-painting which reached its most critical moment in the early sixties with Reinhardt's Black Paintings. The work of Stella, Andre and Judd, which had started from there, soon overturned to the beginnings of in situ and into theatricality. In Europe the work of the Zero group had operated a similar overturn into optical, kinetic and environmental or decorative art. Buren who at the time of BMPT was making paintings at a zero degree (une peinture au degré zéro) overturned into contextualism. ... There are many other cases in which the end of the object-painting is the beginning of something else...

A : But this does not mean that since the sixties artists have not been continuing a line of radical abstraction, even if they have been a minority.

It is precisely because abstract forms have lost their higher meanings that artists today paint these paintings as being negative or neutral while assuming their banality. Radical abstraction has always been there although with little public exposure. It had a bit of exposure through Peinture, Cahiers Théoriques in France in the late seventies, and through the magazine Artistes in the early eighties, then it somehow reemerged under the name of Radical Painting in New York in the eighties and nineties with a group of American and European artists. There are also similar currents in Germany, in the U.K. and elsewhere in Europe.

V : How does your work relate to these abstract tendencies?

A : The exhibition La Couleur Seule in Lyon in 1988 made an incredible mixture of monochrome painters from all generations and countries. It showed that almost identical paintings could be so many different things. "Abstraction" is no more unified than is the rest of art. I understand abstraction as what is abstracted from the direct environment, but you have a lot of art which, although termed "abstract", is open to context through semiotic activity. Abstraction is made from all sorts of combinations...

V : Aren't you enacting once more the end of abstraction into the beginning of something else?

A : Yes, an overturning of Reinhardt's Ultimate Painting inside-out... a potential he had started pointing out himself as we were saying at the beginning of this conversation. But this does not imply the refutation of object-painting as in the cases you mentioned, on the contrary it is a reinforcement of abstraction as being the condition to the unfolding of a new site.

It is important that an artist like Pierre Dunoyer has been stating that his paintings are not objects (tableaux) by nature but through an act of consideration. I like the way he has thrown out formalism and kept the baby! He also shows that you can brush back in the brushstroke and keep

it as impersonal as if it was brushed out.

Olivier Mosset in 1968 started painting his object-paintings (tableau-objet), he was then saying things like "this painting is no more than what it is." He later defined himself more as a painter but he has always remained true to his early statements.

V : He claimed a painting "working only as a painting". And he also talks about an "internal logic to the work", about difference rather than sameness between paintings. He does not want to confuse the painting's resistance to discourse with an essentialist ontology - a position in which art criticism has tended to lock Reinhard's paintings.

A : What I'm interested in is how do you paint "a painting which is only what it is". How does Mosset paint that sort of painting?

The paint over the canvas carries no biographical charge. He says he is foreign to his work, the paintings appear as he makes them. Each painting is detached from any general system or from any chronological sequence. The succession from one painting to another, from one colour to another, or from a series to another does not refer to any rule other than aleatory. He is relaxed and playful in making formal decisions. I think all this is what he means by an internal logic to the work, it is the thread that leads through the various decisions the painting is the result of.

"This painting is any painter's painting", almost is.

V : He is one of the most radical of abstract artists of this time... abstract in the sense of a separation or of an "autonomy" of the painting...

A : But there is more: Mosset's paintings have implications that go beyond the strictly pictorial procedures. The anonymity logically excludes the signature from the front of the painting or from anywhere else on it. His early paintings were neither signed nor dated.

Titles for a long time were "untitled" with the mention of colour medium and size. When later on he starts using titles, they name what you see or they refer to things which obviously have nothing to do with the paintings as it was the case for Stella's early paintings. Anyway the titles' flexibility doesn't prevent them from working around the idea of a non relational object.

In a conversation with Catherine Millet (1977) he talks about the necessity to "detach ourselves from what makes a painting's value, its symbolic or aesthetic value, and its economical value". So, there is also an external logic; it all works like consistent machine.

V : "All artists-as-artists say the same thing"... Even if he has at times taken quite some distance with what you are saying about him, there has always been a sort of tension which proceeds from that logic. Under various disguises, there is the sameness of a repetition... Even when he plays with other logics, it's still the thread.

A : Something is made into and is maintained as what it "is", that logic is both internal and external.

V : These external implications are interesting to examine in the area of reproduction, photography. In this case too, there has to be an adequacy between what a thing is and the way this thing is reproduced. Nobody would think of photographing Fountain from the side or the back as if it was a sculpture in the round... Mosset's paintings are reproduced as perfectly frontal as most paintings are.

How does photography relate to a panel or an Object ?

A : An Object is of course unphotographable. You can reproduce a panel in a more or less adequate way for it to be considered as an Object. But then, an Object has no relations... I mean that if you really consider a panel as an Object, you can photograph it under any angle or lighting, it will always be the object it "is" and not another.

On the side of adequacy, there are many ways to make a photo of a panel: frontally, slightly from the side so you can perceive the width of the stretcher, with a section of the floor, so you can perceive the scale... or you can frame it with no reference marks on the wall, etc. Generally the vertical sides of a panel are parallel to the sides of the photo so that you keep the photographer out of the picture. As anyone else making photos of monochromes, I will try to get an even lighting on the surface. Still, it is always possible to bring up a reflexive disjointure between an Object and its photography... this even within the photography itself.

V : These panels, which are unconcerned about the internal side, can they still be called paintings?

A : Not as panels, but if you define painting as partaking of systems of representation which are beyond the strictly pictorial activity, yes. These paintings are abstract non-iconic icons.

V : It probably hasn't always been easy to show this sort of "painting".

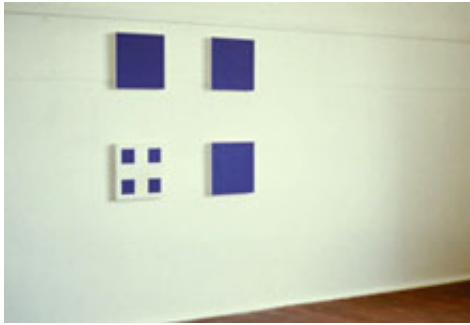
A : In 1990 I had a one person show at PICA with an extension at the IMA in Brisbane in Australia. On one side postmodernists looked at me as if I had my sails flapping in the winds of history, on the other side painters would invite me to see how to exercise a paint brush. Without the support of David Bromfield, Noel Sheridan and Nick Tsoutas this exhibition would never have happened.

I also had a solo exhibition a couple of years later at Nikki Diana Marquardt in Paris. She was very supportive although the show was unsurprisingly a commercial flop. What was important for me in these two shows, was to state clearly the new direction my work had taken.

Of course, I also wanted to test the work and I did then realise that people want to recognise things straight away, they lock you into what they already know; into the past... I then realised that some work still needed to be done on the side of what we called earlier "communication"... That's when we realised that two of us would not be to many in braving the prohibition of the atomic object.

V : What about now?

A : One must hope that what has been going through so many complicated words in this conversation can become simple and direct in the mind and the eye of a spect-actor.



Tableaux, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art / Institute of Contemporary Art, Brisbane.



Tableaux, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art

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9.About the actualisation and the transferability of works.

Viguiier : An Object would have no double, and couldn't be transferred or exchanged... At which level then is the work doubled into an exchangeable generality?... Because there has to be at least an individual and its double in order that a work be recognisable as a work. A thing requires a degree of permanence in order to be lifted and signed.

Aav : Object art is not a composition, but a field which is distributed at the outer side of the limit into multiplicity and immanence. I

consider this exteriority as partaking of the material field of the work. I know you like the idea that all works are limited but myself I remain true to the project of the avant-gardes by wanting to break the work's limits, by wanting to blur the borders between production and reception, between art and "life"!

V : ...

A : What is signed as an individual is not an object or even an Event, but a circuiting, a formula or a cipher, rather than a being. The spirit of the letter.

V : Yes, we saw that with Morris' box-shapes: although the work was identified with the transient experienced variable it was always from the start fixed and exchangeable at the level of its rule or formula. In your case it is clear that what is signed is not something to actualise following prescriptions, it's the general idea as to how something works...

A : To me it is clear that it is about transferring the principles of construction rather than any instructions for what should be constructed. It is important that artists like Lawrence Weiner have established that the work they transfer is independent from a particular mode of actualisation... while then the particular mode of actualisation becomes part of the work.

V : Many works today need to be reactualised at each exhibition, while only subsisting as a document in between exhibitions. The rules of the collection have adapted to this. To (re)-actualise a work then means to restore and to animate the letter with the spirit. We can say that these works merge completely with unbounded intellectual property.

A : What is signed and the signature itself are like two sides of a same coin.

The signature is also a monopoly the exploitation of which is protected by the author's rights.

But the art is not only the spirit, the spirit is what works with the letter in the concrete world...

V : What I find interesting with the Avertissement Buren joins to the contract when selling a work, is the clear articulation between the spirit, the letter and intellectual property. He aims at making it difficult to manipulate the work as a dead letter and at placing "responsibility" on the collector, the curator or the actor in general. But in exchange to observing Buren's strict prescriptions, the owner has the guarantee that the integrity of the global work, of which he owns a part, will maintain its integrity.

Following artists like Buren, Carl Andre or Weiner who have been active in the recognition and the application of the right of intellectual property, artists belonging to the post-conceptual generation like Gonzales Torres request even more strongly those who own or who show works to engage into an active and considerate relation through their

maintenance.

These problems are now to be found at the heart of recent orientations in preventive conservation which are developed in places sheltering contemporary art. This is a question which is central to Ivan Clouteau's survey on the actual function of the registrar of contemporary art collections.

A : Some of these artists, and many others since then have demonstrated that the commercial value of a work does not correspond to it's being but to a right to show something with a certain signature.

V : You make panels which you sell at cost price and you sell certificates which are a right to show panels associated with your name.

A : Yes... generally I sell a panel with a certificate, but if a buyer doesn't want the panel I will subtract its price from the sale.

V : There is something absurd in the one-way alternative of use value having "failed" to resist market value... in the idea of a work which could escape market value and consequently in the idea of a work having "failed" in escaping it... If the work is inseparable from its maintenance, it is also inseparable from the costs the latter entails. Market value is the translation of a degree to which an Event is acted out and of the amount this costs... which also correspond to a degree in public exposure. Acting out, exposure and costs work together (with of course other factors). Increase in value is a translation and a sedimentation of the Event value or of the truth value, or in a more restricted sense of what Benjamin called the work's exhibition value. An artist doesn't necessarily depend on the museum and the market to survive as a person (thanks to the sponsor), but does depend on it to survive as an artist or as a signature.

A : Yes, the work is valueless, it only has added value. Philippe Thomas was right to consider collectors and art actors, or agents as he would say, as the producers of a work's true existence... a bit like in the movie industry. Ghislain Mollet-Viéville has often engaged in playing with this idea as an art agent while challenging the border which would separate him from an artist's position.

In the same way as for artists, you find some collectors, gallerists, curators and also spect-actors who have a lot of Future and little Forecast, and others who have a lot of Forecast and little Future...

If avant-garde art is said to be "resistant" to market value, it is not because it is against market value, it is because it has the means of living despite the fact of having little public exposure and no real market value... it has an autonomy. How could new art be anything else than art-as-art!?

V : Your work has a legal framework, but very little is prescribed through contracts as to how a piece should be actualised ... even its title is left open to choice... How does one handle, how does one show this sort of work?

A : Oh! That's not complicated to start with. You can show a panel like any other abstract painting, the main thing is that you have in mind that it is an Object. You know it's the Event which is the site...

V : But since an absolute object always also keeps a disjointure from any appropriate

Frame, there is the possibility to play off a segment of the Frame against an Object, to revert the transparency of its convention into a reflexive process. By unfolding an Object's implications you can, in that way, "turn around it".

A : Yes, that is also part of what somebody showing can show. You can even play off the title...

V : Aren't you afraid that such an absence of prescriptions regarding the letter can give way to all sorts of abuses?

A : I think the collector's and every one else's interest, and not only the author's, is that a thing is maintained as the thing it "is". Other than what it "is", this thing would have less consistence and probably none at all... To betray the spirit of the letter can be dishonest towards those who have no prior knowledge of the work and ridiculous to the eyes of those who do. ... A work takes care of itself to some extent.



Panel with monochrome attributed to Ivan Puni



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10.About artist books and the physicality of conceptual works.

Viguiier : You talked about an always open alternative between a transparency and a reflexive disjointure. In Dictionnaire, the single word on each page can be either predicative and transparent or disjointed and reflexive when it is put to work in relation to an unrelational object...

Aav : The words' definitions are to be found in one's "dictionnaire de idées reçues", which, like any dictionary, is a discursive formation regulated through institutions as Foucault would say.
The word is put to work in relation to an Object...

V : Dictionnaire, both mobilises and deregulates the static condition of the dictionary as archive. It was once presented in an installation next to a panel open at the word "pure", and another time in a performance in which you explicated the word "transferability", these two works appear themselves in books (1).

A : Books have the advantage of reaching out to an audience you chose. You don't just get the nearby audience you have in galleries. And it costs less money to take the gallery to the visitor than the visitor to the gallery.

V : Spec & Editions is both a gallery and a publisher, a place, or a sort of "heterotopia" (a placeless place) to quote Foucault again... A place, but also a space.

A : Aren't we now here!?

As a gallery space, I like to think that it is not an enclosure which would be filled by a work, but a space generated and spread-out by the work itself. Heterogeneous coordinates are both gathered into a place and spread out into a sort of map. The "gallery space" isn't subordinated to an architectural model.

But when you think of it, even the box-like museum-gallery is always some kind of a map too which is spread through publications, mailing lists and through a diversity of cultural practices of the Frame.

V : Even if Spec occasionally occupies real spaces, it doesn't have the permanency of the museum, it occupies no less the sort of (virtual) space which Heidegger called an "absence of distance".

A : Spec is like an elephant which goes through the eye of a needle between two shows. Its space is then similar to the one you are thinking of when you have lost an email. Place has primacy over space. But we have seen that all this first depended on the "proper distance" of an Object.

V : The book is itself a support for exhibitions, for texts, for advertisements, etc., it seems to loose the self-sufficiency artist's books generally have.

A : A support for something else... the kind of thing which ends in the bin. Still, some people have understood that even the envelope was part of the "book"... Where does the book start and where does it end?

V : As for any artwork, all sorts of people can actualise and act out an Object's implications, but the author is always the first one to do it. The book appears as some sort of Frame and as an index to an Object...

A : Yes, despite never being quite adequate for this... but seen as

effects, these may to some extent imply their cause... They point no less in the direction of the site of an Event. It seems more as if the book made of the limit a surface of transcription.

V : All books are produced in black and white photocopies... you defined them as being specimens.

A : Some of the early books were stamped in blue ink with the word "specimen". It was later found out that the originals the specimens were supposed not to be were no more original than the specimens. How embarrassing!...

V : This means that whoever duplicates a copy on a photocopier has the same specimen?!

A : Yes, that's right... I stopped using the blue stamp when it became clear that the stamped books looked more original than both the originals and the specimens.

V : The books have a documentary side to them in the way the exhibition catalogue has. But even then the documentary images are cleaned out as to look like collages... sometimes they look more like projects than actual productions. This is maybe why you ended up being classified as an "illustrator" in one of our famous institutions.

A : Quite a few works we consider now as historical only existed as projects in their own time; you only have to think of the constructivists, de Stijl, dada, etc. The documents related to Fountain published in The Blind Man and in Rongwrong in 1917, were they a documentation or an illustration?

Seth Sieglaub is the one who made the most clear statement in this regard when he said in 1969 about the exhibition he had organised with conceptual artists and about the catalogue he had published: the exhibition is only an illustration of the catalogue. Weiner has always refused to give priority to "a concrete fact" over "a potential feasible fact", it is the same here.

I see no clear cut between documentation and illustration in the sense of a cut between the actuality of what is happening and the virtuality of what could happen or of what has already happened and could happen again. Each of these moments can't exist without enclosing in itself the others.

V : Does this mean that the work can dispense with it's physical reality?

A : Not at all. Besides it is wrong to think that conceptual art, or even dematerialised art, would be set in an opposition to the "materiality of the work". Conceptual art (as, in other respects, modelling theories) has precisely shown us that the idea operates within the bodies of things. Art is a concrete thing, there is no art without a material and factual reality. I often do move things around in pictures but they are always based on photographic documentation... even if it has sometimes gone through several generations of photocopies.

Without the possibility of an Object hic et nunc out there, there is no

Object art. But for an Object to exercise its effects all you need to know is that it exists. The concrete reality of a work, of any artist's work, doesn't only come from its "physical presence" - as premised in concrete art and modernist movements. The virtual work encloses the moment of its actuality as the actual work encloses its virtual moments and their potential effects. The physical actuality is only a moment of a work's factual existence.

Sometimes ideas do more things, have more physical effects, than physical objects... As Gregory Bateson said: physical causes can produce virtual effects and virtual causes can produce physical effects... This of course assumes that I consider a work's Event as partaking of its material existence.

V : Finally is Object art to be found in an Object and its Event or in its cipher, its signature?

A : I make no separation between these things... I only make one at the level of market economy in which only the signature can be the operator of an exchange.

V : Well, that will be all for now. Tomorrow we will continue our conversation in French.

A : Oui.

Notes:

1- Manifeste. A présentation of Dictionnaire, Spec & Editions, 1998; Spec 2001. And Explication by Aav, Spec, 2004.

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